POETRY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

In the stream of poetry which, in spite of crisis and difficulties, never ceases to pour over the arid intellectual lands of this country one had got to feel a certain boredom over the line of verse either printed or MS. Too many review copies can spoil the soup of the highest art. It began to be very clear why people don't read poetry in our time. The answer was too obvious. Because it is so damned dull and meaningless.

But a tonic will always affect the most jaded palate. Returning from a real desert where there were no books, no wireless, no weeklies, no culture for the masses, but only the hauteur of camels and the drone of prayer of those who live by worthless coins in a tin bowl, it was possible to see things in their right perspective. All the weekly masterpieces issued by publishers seemed trash and dead meat though still smelling of the press in more ways than one. Only the idle Cinderella poetry seemed worth the trouble of concentrated attention, still fresh and alive, even if it happened to be a reprint of twenty, or forty, or a hundred years ago.

One such reprint from Messrs. Faber of the Cantos of Ezra Pound, which came in too late for notice in this issue of *Poetry Quarterly*, is an example. It is a great monument to a period of revolution in the technique of poetry which, whether it is hailed as the work of a modern Dante or joins in time the dim limbo of Browning's longer poems, must always remain a milestone, however many forks may appear on the road ahead.

One of the main reasons why it is impossible for the young poet to get a hearing is the cost to the publisher of producing his work. A brave attempt to remedy this in the only sensible way is being undertaken by Fore Publications with their well-produced series of Key Poets at a shilling. That Edith Sitwell is included in the first ten of these little books shows what interest and generous attention our greatest poets are giving to the problem of giving poets a hearing. In spite of the older journalists there *is* a public for poetry, but it hasn't got any money.

J. R. HERVEY

Variations on a Theme of John Donne

Only death adds to our length, nor are we grown
In stature to be men till we are none.

Donne: AN ANATOMY OF THE WORLD

Bent beneath the boughs of time a man
Is less than a man:
Diminished diminished, except for the grave's adoption,
The anonymous.

Although he take the rain upon his shoulders
The hapless root
Is bitten by fire, and smothering the yellow grass
Life is iron.

Only out of a window open towards
The extravagant grave
May he see a summer, a madcap gleam of growth,
In a thought stand upright.

Else is he but a chime of bones, a rag
Riding the wind,
Neither enriched by a ghost nor entrusted with
The key to a god.

He is the agile pilgrim winning only
A witless journey:
Pomp-pauperized, with begging bowl of hope,
Death owes him nothing.

He may dream a crown but not for him shall be
A coronation:
Brave from all banquets not for him the table
Of daintier death.

What is he more than a waif woven into
The autumn disaster?
O rejected leaf black in the bitter alleys
Where is your spring?

Migratory, he shall seek and find pastures
Pretending wealth,
But through the wound of death shall he emerge
On the lush levels.

This leaden man by alchemy of death
Is sudden gold:
A god ruined beneath the roof of the sky
Finds stature in a leap.

His earth is a rocking stone in resolute waters,
Not even a safety
Island before the plunge, but to sink in death
Is to be established.

from *Landfall* (New Zealand)

ALLEN CURNOW

November Elegy

Spring in his death abounds among the lily islands,
There to bathe him for the grave antipodean snows
Fall floodlong, rivermouths all in bloom, and those
Fragile church timbers quiver
By the bourne of his burial where robed he goes
No journey at all. One sheet's enough to cover
My end of the world and his, and the same silence

While in Paddington autumn is air-borne, earth-given,
Day's nimbus nearer staring, colder smoulders;
Breath of a death not my own bewilders
Dead calm with breathless choirs
O bird-creation singing where the world moulders!
God's poor, the crutched and stunted spires
Thumb heavenward humorously under the unriven

Marble November has nailed across their sky:
Up there, dank ceiling is the dazzling floor
All souls inhabit, the lilied seas, no shore
My tear-smudged map mislimned.
When did a wind of the extreme South before
Mix autumn, spring, and death? False maps are dimmed,
Lovingly they mock each other image and eye.

The ends of the earth are folded into his grave
In sound of the Pacific and the hills he travelled singing;
For he ferried like a feather the crushing dream, bringing
The Word, the Wine, the Bread.
Some bell down the obliterating gale was ringing
To the desert the visiting glory; dust he trod
Gathered its grains for a miracle, and the nave

He knelt in put off its poor planks, loomed loftier,
Lonelier than Losinga's that spells in stone
The Undivided Name. O quickening bone
Of the masspriest, under grass
Green in my absent Spring, sweet relic atone
To our Lord's earth for the pride of all our voyages,
That the salt winds which scattered us blow softer.

from *Landfall* (New Zealand)

LOUIS JOHNSON

Uneasy Victor

His tenderest fallacy was to imagine himself
Faithful to her whose eyes perpetually turned
To see him only in the mirage of brightness
He walked in for her through a negligent world.

She was, to him, subject of doubt and guilt,
And to considerable fickle intrusions, but yet
Worthy in her own fashion of the gifts
Of a more magnanimous moment when he felt

Perhaps some solace in her adoration,
Restricting his grandiose views to take her in
To a humbler scheme of things, plaiting her hair
Between demonstrative fingers, stroking the skin

But discovering, after the enterprise, the doubt
That raced through fingers, fibres, turning him back
Into a world where conquest was harder, and all
Diligence paid was a knowledge of need and his lack.

For My Mother

I cannot think of you without that pain
pangs, as the light broke to these new-born eyes,
you too have known, walked maimed
for twenty years tending your children's cries
and bearing pity like a branch, and love,
another cross you carry where you move.

prisoned in flesh that crucifies each day,
yet would release pain's prisoners bringing balm
to the salt wounds of circumstance, or prey,
a dove of labour to descend in calm,
restorative and able to assuage
grief with that firm, maternal language

whose verbs are bright with sanctuary.
O bigot-burdened, all-remembered one,
course-hardened, cruising for love's estuary,
pity whose love is less, believing none
moves weakly with such strength or so assured
love grants her might more potent than the sword,

Yet of that guidance have I, hale and whole,
harrowed, hallowed your pain and borne
only these words, remorse that knots the soul
at having nothing better to perform
to honour love's ample guidance and the guide.
I have but words, and you, the place of pride.

BREWSTER GHISELIN

Blue Word

Seeing on the hill among the windy grasses' slanting wires
Lupines, with leaves like hands and warm pea-blossom spires,
Striping with blue the wild oats' May day green,
I stare in long hope, seeking with heart and senses and mind
To know of all their meanings what they most deeply mean.

Is it not enough in the steamy thick of the spring to remember
How these things stroked by sun into length and flower
September
Heaven will focus on? No, I must break
The death-stained grapple of that thought with weight of giant
mind
Leaning us down, must wrestle, a dreamer writhing to wake.

Is it not enough—this sensual nod of flowers sliding out
Under the heels of the wind, teaching away my doubt,
Telling I am whole and here? No. Enough would uncloud
And sun to delight what aches beneath the black of the mind,
Seeming to look from this flower-blue like the eye of a dark
crowd.

What wrestling cruncher shreds me apart on the rack of time?
I have dreamed it, who would not find a poem in its spread
of rime,
Nor flower in its history. I? This blue-flower blue
Is Now that rimes all times into Time; to heart, sense, mind,
The blue of Being, the Word's flowering, the only true.

from *Western Review* (Iowa)

DORIAN COOKE

Marriage Poem

Because I have come to the place
Where cold prayers cross to flesh, and no worn hands
Mark maps of famine on the visiting sands,
What blessings shall the rain's sweet bugles mix?
What change shall sweep the stored streets of my face?
Bread breaks to bone; and bone is charred to bricks;
Old masonry and mud, rags, the ribs and roots
Of beasts are lowered to new pulp. Flesh burns,
And wood will burn; blood dries, and dead flesh rots.
Words drop to ruin, as the worm-world turns.

The loved friends of my childhood nights
Have all gone down to death, where the beasts go down
With a rustle of curls and hairy gown.
Now other phantoms that might mourn the bell
Of passing feud and feast have drowned their lights,
And lie like grey gulls in a shut sea-cell.
I know with this passing there is no more noise
In the turrets where my dark brother hangs
Under the time-blown slates; and I rejoice
To snatch from god his iron heart's loaded fangs.

I praise this day more than all days
Of the remarkable season that my hands
Carved out from curved lights and disastrous lands;
—Those building and opposing myths, and the time
Of the breaking of old fibre. I praise
This pattern of destruction. The fires that climb
Must be felled again, and with their last fall
Bring light to the conquered soil. And now I must
Both make and unmake in this place, and call
Across the sweet sea-acres carved from dust.

VINCENT FERRINI

Can You Hear?

I

hear
the heartbeat
in the stone

hear the golden
coins
slipping
from the poplar
to the ocean

he is picking them up
for orphans

while
pebbles grinding
each other
against the undertow
pull
the night
down
with them

he is among
the talk of the
pebbles
carrying in his
pockets
oracles

hear the
heartbeat in his
hands
wandering
among broken
cities
healing people

hear the tongue
of time
licking
the walls away

hear
the grasses
making
love
to the dead
wanting to reach
the living

O he is
the stranger
in your body

II

can you hear
the roots
of him

O the stones
are sobbing

for the people lost
in their own dark
caves

will they ever
come out

when they take
the stranger in

they will have
in their palms the
running water
of song

and what is the
song of the water

the roots are people
and the people are
roots
untapped

O sunlight
explode the tightening
walls of the
caves

and set the air
on fire
with the freedom
love is bursting with

there is still time
for you and I
are the tree roots

of untold
miracles

O people
to
find

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

God Creating Adam

(*after the picture by William Blake*)

Through the valley of the shadow of birth
He moves, compelled; he comes, a pallid victim—
He comes with woe forefathering the pangs
Of parturition till the end of time.

Dumb, dumb his mouth; yet forming to a cry
Foregoing that from every man divulged
Into the light by rhythmic squeeze of pain.

What sweats, what shudderings!—as consciousness
Looms now, unnumbs, from the devoted blizzard,
And being's surge through his made form undams.

He pleads against. But still the unmoved, grave,
Insisting Father leans out over him,
Gazing the sick green shadow from his face.

Arrival in September

And now the longest nights unload their cargo
Of lives upon a light-bathed shore.
Those who were stored
In the deep hold when most the sun was absent
Wake to this auburn feast of his fulfilment;
Who left the gloom-encircled evergreen
Dazzled on warmth and flushed abundance dine.

Softly they enter now—a people
Dark-eyed and passionate and virginal,
With hands that revel in the feel of earth
And hearts that are at home in silence, absence;
A folk who tardily mature
And love this season best of all—

When dahlia, goldenrod,
Monbretia, chrysanthemum full-fill the border;
Light glitters on clustered wings of bluebottles;
Taut wasps investigate, and windfall plums
Tramp on the grass, like someone coming.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

A Neglected Garden

The death of Nijinsky, 1950

It is here he will come,
To these long, melancholy lakes, bordered by green,
And the ruined temple
Over which the lizard ivy undulates
And nods its angular leaves, lapped scale on scale.

This quiet, neglected
Garden, last relic of an ampler age,
Raising its sons
As monumental as the urn, the trophy
They set, where now the sinuous grass expells

All trace of glory,
And where the lichen lies as thick and golden
As pollen from the lily.
For here the white droves of the immortal swan
Sink in a visitation of grace and silence,

And here the rose
Unfolds a leaf, and in the frost of moonlight
Opens, a spectre
Of pale immaculate ivory cusped in green,
The shape of music and of remembered dreams.

Here too, at noon
The unwatchful countryman will glimpse, in shadow
A face whose calm
Archaic smile he has not seen before,
And a faun, as dappled as the glade he treads

Will leap to the light,
Forgetting those long years when the body's penance
Lay on the spirit,
And, as to this garden's melancholy ruin
The rose returns, for him is resurrection.

TESSA M. SILLARS

Sombre Sola

The seamless circle shuts.
Small words are no more spoken,
But the sand
Cries with its unfeigning tongue
For utterance
Of the inevitable.
It must be named.

It must be named in the body's rhetoric:
These embroidered statements, attitudes,
Move from the heart
Along the fine, white nerves
To the wrist, the fingertips,
Invite, resist.
In the articulation of
Meticulous, particular patterning
It must be known.

At the point of exquisite
Extremity
It must be known:
In that uniquely solitary place
Where flesh and spirit, beyond division
Know
The sword of separation
Clean between flesh and flesh.

Watch knowledge wither
In the wound,
Faith flower on the horn,
Where the sharp-edged shadow cuts
Across arrested anecdote.

It must be complied with
And the will embrace
The mellow moment.

DAVID WRIGHT

A Voyage to Cytherea

AFTER BAUDELAIRE

I, like a bird, flew on a happy wing,
Hovering freely among the shrouds;
An angel drunken in a blazing sun,
The ship heaved under a sky without clouds.

What is that sad and dark looming island?
Cytherea, they tell us, the famous in song,
And usual Eldorado of every ancient
Lover: I found her a feeble kingdom.

O island of secrets and of festivals!
Proud ghost of Venus, below whom her sea
Disposes, a cloud of odour, and encircles
The room love inhabits, and accidie.

Island of myrtles and disclosing flowers,
To whom all peoples have afforded homage,
Where, incense over a garden of roses,
Worshippers' sighs around her image

Drift—a woodpigeon's unending echoing!
Yet Cytherea was a measly dominion,
Wilderness broken by bitter crying,
Where I perceived a strange phenomenon.

There goes, in desire of flowers, no young
Priestess of a temple that's shadowed behind
Woods, in whose body a fire may burn,
Opening half of her skirt to the wind;

For we, close inshore, and hugging the shallows
Until our white sails made the birds rise and fly,
Distinguished the forked silhouette of a scaffold,
Like a cypress, ebony against the sky.

Winged, unspeakable, perched on the destroyed
Corruption of a man, their hanging food,
Were birds, who each an evil beak employed
To dig the corpse wherever there was blood;

His eyes were two holes, and from the sutures
Of belly to thighs, the guts undulated;
Stuffed with unlovely titbits, his butchers
Pecked the tatters of a man castrated.

Four-footed, eager, and under his feet,
With lifted muzzles to snuff his presence,
Roamed a pack, in whose middle one great beast
Seemed a hangman among his assistants.

O inhabitant of this island, who
Was born under so pleasant a heaven,
For the crimes which deny a tomb to you
In silence you suffer expiation.

What is your grief, is mine also, absurd
Criminal! Seeing your hanging limbs
I taste a vomit mounting toward
The teeth, of my torment the bitter streams.

Poor devil who paid so highly, before
You I have suffered, felt jaw and talon
Of panther and raven, who long ago
Ground to powder my flesh and skeleton.

The sky enchanted, and asleep the sea
Knitted a calm; but henceforward rage,
Bloody and dark, my environs must be;
I have shrouded my heart in this image.

All that stands on your island, Aphrodite,
Is a scaffold where my bones hang blackened . . .
Then give me nerve and vigour, O Christ, to
Contemplate body and soul, unsickened!

MARGARET WILLY

Lament

Always I hear that death which tolls
Time's hostages from earth,
And lends to feather, fern and flesh
The wonder and miraculous
Light of some second birth.

Curved lip and laughing eye house this
Insidious worm. No friend
Nor foe but feels its power shrink
The womb we curled in, lover's kiss,
To one insentient end.

Between the ape-and-angel-nature
We toss, without repose;
And even in flush of spring, remember
Flesh and fire of the human creature
Must join the autumn rose.

Bound in this web of brain and bone,
Our individual cross
We bear; though sharing doom of wren
And tiger, Adam's son alone
Anticipates his loss;

Mourning that dawn wins brief reprieve
From night, that shrouds the grass.
How may the root, though it believe
In the sap's message, cease to grieve
For all its flowers that pass?

J. M. CALDER

November

Only in these cold
November days can you
Find the true nature
Behind the taut skin.
Another melancholy
Inhabits resigned
To temporary structure
Of reinforced tissue,
Awakening the dark
Distance to glow
Again in fertile
Sadness of memory
And is like a door
That opens to rooms
Where love is remembered
But rooms become strange
And unknown, uncared.
Here is dissenting
Witness that golden
Turns not the past.
Only the eye
Reads like a ruler
Perpendicular passage
Of blue-black on white,
Finding a comfort
That flickers no more
In grasping the word.
November is only
With February paired
As voids in the year
Conducive to thought,
Dividing the winter
As sector of circle
With lines to the still
Peace of the centre.

CHARLES HIGHAM

The St. Francis of Zurbaran

The skull, assurance of a flesh that fails,
is staring to the mouth, the eye, enraptured;
his simple passion glows through fold, through lambent
and speechless tears of darkness; from the torn
robe there escapes the pungent sacrament,
the spiced repression of his weary soul,
while trees within the coiling distance shrouded
are effigies of pity and despair.

His book is sulphur yellow, wrought by stricken
proselytes, poets, driven to fire the Latin
phrases that bud on altars, where each censer
spirals in fume and ferment; his gaunt shape,
twisted with its rejection, pours each fitful
pain to salvation's cup and brims it over.
A taper's lit behind the shadowed eyelid,
and every dream he knows is one more plague.

JULES SUPERVIELLE

Alive

Since I have placed my foot
On the heart of the night
I am a man caught up
In the starry nets.

I am ignorant of the peace
Known to mankind
And even my slumber
Is consumed by the sky.

Nakedness of my days,
They have crucified you;
Birds of the forest,
Frozen, in tepid air.
Ah! you fall from the trees.

(*translated by Alec Smith*)

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Poem XVII

from *Shadows of My Love*

The black sheep of the winter night
Drag their long sad columns past.
The stars are sown across the air
Like brilliant amethystine jets.

See how the searchlights over there
Play flickering like the Northern Lights!
This is a Battle of Blossoms where
The shells have changed the flower's sex.

The phallic organs of the guns
Get with child the amorous earth.
The instincts of the times are rough
Even as love resembles war.

Salutations, regiment,
Returning to the trench again;
In the pale, distracted sky,
Victory hangs over you.

My heart shall kiss these separate fronts,
Breast of my Toutou, breast of War,
What these have done we two shall do,
Farewell then, O my best-beloved.

(*translated by Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford*)

LORNA BRADE

Poem for Afternoon

I

A long, dry shaft of light is drawn
Through the windy streets to the point of converging ends.
It strikes the window frames in the sharpness
Of the late afternoon to which there is no returning
Through the shadow pointed from a lonely palm
Long forgotten by the roadmakers.

II

Sand blows over the broken sidewalks sore
With heaped decay, where the bawdy-house, palely
Excoriated, stands watch behind green shutters.
Here they lie, newspaper and watermelonrind and offal,
All badly concealed by chance and circumstance,
Wishing it were not so;
But the effort is too great to rise so far
To top the fluted minaret and disperse
On the coursing breath of the Empty Quarter
As the spirit listeth.
All wishing is to lurk at the doorpost
Till the heat be done.

III

The voice of the minaret calls, and calls
More insistently but not more urgently
For it knows how the men in the coffee-houses
Have sat hour upon hour with their dice,
Tric and trac on the polished board,
Repeating the thought, word in, word out,
The bead in the skull;
And how behind the lonely curtain
Is the slow gurgling of the hubble-bubble
Waiting and awaiting its end
Where the streets converge.

IV

'Come, O refuse of the sunken pavement,
Blown in folly, cast in pain.
Call upon your God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
For His gifts are plentiful
As the sand that folds to the furtive heart
Caught in the half-closed half-dream of green shutters.
Lift your pitiful strength to the burning
Of the desert wind before it fails
That your flesh smoulder to ash
And your incense fill the cruel coasts
Of my complacency with myrrh and labdanum
Until, to pall this ended fantasy of lights
And shades, the sinking lines shall spin
And gather into webs of blindness.

Omen for a Child

Come, let us walk among the standing trees
That cast their lines before the sun,
And watch the barricaded emptiness that traps
The interluding wind behind the parallels
For a hostage.
Here we shall catch our fragmentary twisted hopes
In the years that lie between,
Winning as we can before Elusion forfeits our game
In a close season.
Let us consider all the shifting potentialities
That fall to sight, while there is time,
While there is yet a doubt about the way
The shadows fall in place around the garden dial—
Consider each disturbance of the lighted ground
And mark it on the recorder, for a lingering hour,
So long as some small residue of integrating doubt
Remains.
Here are the unawaited unfixed forms
That fill the background of receding trees,
Disturbing the pattern up the bole and frond,
The pattern of the tealeaf in the cup,
The stranger uninvited, undesired,

Come to loose the strings of destiny that bind
The old design, piling up the conflicts of the mind
Insecurely hollow in the set of draughts,
Obstructing silent, unfamiliar shafts and arcs
In a waxing month.
The tricksy corner-stone belies a trust and shifts
As Burnham at the invader's stress
For when the day-clock sleeps the busy agent plies
His gnawing file and unexpectedly
The wind comes on its own; patterns of construction
Fall and with them all the recorded lights that gave them
Substance. Fieldmice in their holes
Disturb the earth and move a mountain to rebirth
Through wells of privacy; then indeed
The moon will freeze the new-set line concrete
To the hard horizon and leave uprooted herbs
To resolution of their bitterness.
This is the silently inglorious way
That monuments disintegrate; sightless one by one
Is left to grow dry for rosemary and in the measure
Of its substance mark the shift
Of holy ground. Except ye fall;
Except there be recession through the nullity—
This is the way the tombs are overthrown
And guardian rocks are rolled apart
In resurrection.
Come, let us take a walk among the trees
And watch the shadow move the lighted path
Before the forbidding.

EDWARD FIELD

Age of Heroes

I

Our flowers go bright for death:
Long wings, our new steel petals, glow
As the pistil withers:
And we are heroes striding into battle
As the radiant explosions of the guns
Halo our dying, glorious age.

Homer, old, blind to impossibility,
Chanted the spirit into rocky soil,
Planted his useless eyes and heroes sprang to life.
Young, I sing like the wind on the fuselage
The plunging colours of my age, eyes wide
As the battle reaps the heroes from the sky.

II

We don our sheepskins for the icy, high
Mesas of the sky, go hunting our prey,
Steel mastodons trumpeting
The monoliths of cloud. Our glory,
The chase. What if we have no trophy
To skin, drag home! We offer our own
Scattered entrails, smoking engines to the gods
By which we read our prophecy.

Like Joshua we bomb the town
That tumbles down to rubble.
We win no promised land, it's true;
A cratered country is more trouble
Than it's worth statistics show:
We'd rather win the battle than the war;
In gauntlet of flak we find the milk-and-honey
Glory that we're fighting for.

Spartan our formation wing to wing
As we take the heading of the bombing run;
The crosshairs of the bombsight trap the town;
Invincible we are as our loves behind us sing,
'Flak at three o'clock' over the interphone.
And our Achilles grandly weeps,
As he plots the wind-vector,
For Patroclus shot down for keeps
By the jet-propelled Hector.
And we watch our act of pure objective murder:
Finger flicks a switch
And bombs fall downward in majestic order.

We are Greek enough: Heroic
Servants bearing gifts of bombs
And if we sow no marble culture,
Build no temples in our conquered Troys,
We act a grandly tragic drama
Chorused by a squadron of the boys.
We are done with idealistic sculpture:
'Fighter coming in at twelve o'clock'
The hour of the Fates is here
Raking the plexiglass;
We clutch the wound, fall on our knees,
As noble as
A dying hero of Praxiteles.

Galahad, Gawain, Lancelot,
We ride four-engined steeds to seek the Grail,
The perfect shell-burst that cannot
Pierce our armour-plated coats of mail
Streaked with grease and sweat.
Gun-turrets conceal the archers
That strafe the Infidel that hold the Holy City.
Lion-Hearts, wear on your sleeve
The token of my love;
Knights of the silver wing,
I sing your flaming downward-arc of glory.

For we ascend with Christ from runway,
Burn our spirits pure in the Holy Ghost of battle;
In our mouth the wafer of bullet turns to His blood.
Mary, Mary send me back
On another mission through your kingdom of the air;
Mother of Heaven, give me again
Your lips in the virgin kiss of flak;
Protect the ailerons of my plane
With the camouflage of your virgin hair.

Short is our life but great our fame:
Watching our death as a bomber catches fire,
A funeral pyre falling through the air;
To the rhythm of our fifty-caliber guns
We chant their glory and their praise,
'Forever in heaven of endless bombing runs . . .

III

Our flower grows bright for death:
And I have seen on shoulders the nubs of wings
Ready to sprout,
Burned by the merchants when we returned
Weary from flight.
Let them work their sly, regressive tricks;
Mutation happens;
Stone-axe and spear, crossbow and gun
Are heroes' weapons.

The age grows bright:
The hands that hold the flower full of money
Will clutch death soon;
But we are heroes flying into the battle
That reaps us from the sky.

Dying with no laurel on our brow,
What matter; ours is the hero's death;
And I have seen the nubs of wings
And wings will grow when merchants rot.
Yes, we who are heroes now will die,
But one will age and lose his sight,
Plant a new winged spirit with his useless eyes,
Chant to flight young folded wings,
And fill the skies with flying heroes.

EDWIN BROCK

For a City

I was a part of the snake that slid between
Your waiting welcome with the sound
Of music and the gay girls throwing flowers

And there was mystery among the flat stones
Crept up from the river. And the head
In the halflight dancing
And the dialogue of the dead and their dogs

Old men gobbed their homeward journey
With their terror tight inside them
And their eyes turned down

Each conversation merely a pause
Before the mind is drawn away
To a face that no one knows
Out of the grass a grey stone grows alive

II

It is a terrible thing that I . . .
Cannot come to know your . . .
Half head with a brain that still . . .
Beats in the breast of the broken one a terrible
Thing that I cannot come to know: your half head
With a brain that still beats

Chimes in the heart of the broken one
Your time, your terror your half-hoped
For death by drowning in a dry sea

Walks in the wake of all we brothers
A terrible thing that I cannot come to know:
Your half-heard, half-drowned, still-beating
Brain afloat in our desire

III

Kela you have touched me again
Sweet Kela driving rivets through my head
And feet. O street I am one with your
Winding faith again. You shelter me

Where are we going? Are we going
Kela? Or does your breast move always
And not move. In spring the grass
Is at your throat, your children leave
But I will not leave you Kela. I cannot move

IV

I was a part of the music
And the halflight dancing
The old men with dogs and
The brain that still beats

O Kela your terror touched me
And turned my misery to madness
A terrible thing turns in my head

And half a light
Illuminates the rose. The white
Rose growing half in darkness droops
And mystery is drowned beneath the stone.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

It Comes To This . . .

How quiet this room is, how quiet and alone,
How alone I am, and the old maps of Norfolk
On the walls with their childhood names—Brancaster, Holme,
The Burnhams, Market and Deepdale, Sutton and Thorpe,
And Lynn, and the bright lines of road, river and brook
That trace from memory each half-forgotten thought.

The old cartographer's art does no more than mark
Names of place that turn to points in time, only map
From then to now, and draw out from my childhood's dark
Those signposts whose strange names I did not understand,
But now I see they marked the narrow track and gap
Through tangled, uncharted country to love's new land.

Thus it all comes to this, my darling, this moment,
This room, this love, the lines on the maps, all Time's past
Intricacies determined and Time's humours spent,
All to this sure acknowledgment. How can I say
More, prove more than that even laggard Time at last
Has sought through my love the newly-mapped only way.

PETER STANFORD

Now in the Prevalence of Favourable Omens

waiting in the garden at this hour
coupled with the abundance of town angels
creates the illusion of a possible way out
yet the moss has not grown less green
nor has the worm ceased in the tumbled beams

why do you always come at night
in this old walled garden treading carefully
between the heaps of thistle-decked rubble
and lifting your dated dress
in case you soil the much-mended hem

now in the prevalence of favourable omens
doubtless largely false and certainly misleading
the green vinegrown shell of the conservatory
moves and opens at your coming
like one of those obscene plants that feed on grubs

the lake is grown over with illusory slime
and the plaster facing has slipped from the wooden pillars
last week from the upper floor at evening
the governess window gave way and fell
while I laughed through the nursery bars

the staircase is a garish fun-fair
for the rabbits and the rats and the hall
has largely crumbled with the recent rain
save where the empty niche still guards
the memory of the stolen marble statue

looking across the mound of rhododendron
between the two stone pillars and the shutters
the hall is seen far small and moonlit
as in a round gilt mirror at twilight
distorting the vague reflective distance

the tallest crooked chimney pot
the one that only swayed with the falling
of the unwanted governess window
is nearly past the moon and you will not come
fearing tonight the city's pale aurora

I will climb again the trellis of the eastern wing
and scan the distant orchard path and hill
then walk along the ankle-clinging corridor
to where the moon is waiting as I have waited
but the chimney will not shake itself for me.

SUZANNE LETHBRIDGE

Poem

If it was only to weep, and in weeping
To stay the unholy passage of all our gods
Who, walking in the roads of righteousness
Wander like sightless beasts in a perfect sky,
Peeling their undyed flesh in fruitless acrimony.

If it was only to look, only to stand and stare
Then might a thousand suns revolve,
And crystal glass reflect a grain of corn
Making the earth a story to be told.

O speak, say, and in speaking
Weave out a web of time so infinite
As to tear the silent cry from sleepless dreams
And make smooth mockery of desire.
For in that sleep where flies the ever circling dove
Lies too the absolute crescent of ceaseless reckoning,
And sour belaboured lust tolls out
Its last cantation of condemned love.

Why then so mute, as if the gods would wear
A gaudy blouse to cover up their shame!

ROBERT KILIAN BRADY

The Five Sorrowful Mysteries

I

Around us Lisbon! Look, my love,
Here is the shabbiness that never
Was genteel. Those roofs—the lanes
Winding winsome hugger-mugger thrown
From Hangman's Close to that child swimming
So far below (do you see him, hear him?)
Are ache-sepultures.
Yes, some ache

To bear, and some for birth, and many
Pray: all beneath those roofs, these tiles, they
Are buried dark in womb or fetid passion
And the infant eye is swollen while the
Pregnant mother turns the uneasy coin.
Sheer time is the moment and the river is long.

Long, O my heart's love, do not leave me!
Do not leave me now in this bitter magic,
To ponder the sun and the city alone.

II

To think of the indisputable
Beauty of this panorama, wearies me.
My body, the unaccepted shade that
Keeps me company, can no way contain,
Lacks muscle tones to feel and register
This load, this incubus of sun and city
Strident with loveliness.

No, with the quaint
Valour of old stones, convents, fountains, and
Decaying roofs like raw pigments spread
Tawny across the impassive radiant day
Vainly I search my heart for sympathy.

Too dry is the air, too dim in the distance
Castle and colour and the river is long.

Long, O my heart's love, do not leave me!
Do not leave me now in my own dread handclasp
To ponder this sun and this city alone.

III

Several different ways there must
Be of regarding the panorama after all:
Several tragic and the unavoidably
Absurd. No doubt somewhere between
The red-sailed yacht and Hangman's Close,
On the hill where the sentry at the prison struts,
There must be fun found.

Comedy indeed
Mocks the tawdry glitter of the day
On church, on bank, on family washing strung
(Breeze puppetry) and on causeway-stones:
While gallimaufry laughter pauses
Stealthily in lobbies between room and room.
Dark is the giggling and the river is long.

Long, O my heart's love, do not leave me!
Do not leave me now with the brittle laughter
To ponder the sun and the city alone.

IV

There is also the historical
Aspect of the matter—how there came
Crusaders from England and they took,
Or helped to take, this city from the Moors;
Knowing these streets, some feet down,
And these same turnings, and the same sea
Groaned on its shingle beach.

True, Saint Anthony
Was born just here; and centuries later
Siege by Castile, revolt and bourgeois rule;
And here the thousands above the gaping earth
Writhing to heaven while the unburied dead
Stank in the runnels: The terrible earthquake
Is now forgotten but the river is long.

Long, O my heart's love, do not leave me!
Do not leave me now in the desert of time
To ponder this sun and this city alone.

V

And there is, as well, the sand and rock
Underlying Lisbon and every place
The world over: the conspiracy
Of millions of inarticulate years
Thronging together, and drains opening
In the stone discover fossils
From a never dreamt-of sea.

Ay, the stability
Of the earth is no more than a grade
Of the always flowing element on
Which a sun shines daily and withdraws:
Before life swarmed at all there was
Sun and the moonlight and a sea-city
Potential in stone, and the river was long.

Long, O my heart's love, do not leave me,
Do not leave me now, with the geologic past-scape
To ponder the sun and the city alone.

W. McDERMOTT

Betrayed

Brittle, the brown leaves crackle underfoot,
Splitting along the sinews of its hand,
Slowly, with wavered feet, she passes on
Into the forest depth to find her tree.
This one or that? The elm, the wrinkled oak?
Birch, or the larch, the spruce, the dusty fir?
None of these call to her. She knows the path
Into the glade where she sat long ago.
The air resounds with music at her touch.
And murmurs faint the melodies of love,
For here she pledged her lips and eyes and heart
Lost years gone by, and yet the songs sing still.
She stoops to draw a bluebell from the earth,
And cups into her palm a pearl of dew
Which wets the flesh, and passes into tears
So gently draining down from pallid cheek.
The music swells to sky—the tree is near,
This willow wilting down to mother's womb
And passing underneath the vinelike veils
Sharply her head sweeps to the woodcut words.
Initial scars—now healed, but still in shape,
Words of the past which meant so much one day
Stand falsely there to mock her love-killed soul.
She lifts the blade and stabs it in the name.
Laughing, with madness on her grief-stained brow
She curses man and casts his soul to hell,
Then swaying, heedless to the bluebell crushed
Beneath her foot, sinks earthward to the womb.
Brittle, the brown leaves crackle as she falls,
Splitting along the sinews of her hand,
Slowly, with misting eyes, she passes on
Into a forest of death beneath her tree.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

The Birch Tree—Spring

My birch tree grows to populate my sky,
My silver tree I watched so carefully,
Supple as flame and all its tracery
Carved on a green wind's nonchalance, my joy.

Morning shall sing and day be bright of eye
While birds go back and forward busily.
A feather's weight my world, so easily,
Released from dark, does spirit learn to fly.

Up, up, my song, and try the height of day,
Or if you will, lie hushed in reverie
To watch my birch tree in its bravery,
Whose gaiety permits of no alloy.

For she returns who has been long away.
I gaze and gaze and try impossibly
To check my leaping spirit peaceably,
While sun goes dancing all around the sky.

The Birch Tree—Autumn

Blue purity of sky and yellow gold,
Cold fire of the world blown brighter than all stars
Now drowned beneath depth of morning, fill my heart,
For it thirsts to the clear well of primeval calm.
In earliest time, before the blood ran down
From savage sorcerers gashed to invoke the rain
Thus the light opened, and the trees were gold,
And the leaves fell from the trees in those years also.
Not all our blood shall make the grass more green;
Our weeping is but frost and quickly gone.

Blue of no substance, distance, lake of light,
Lave my scarred thought in stillness, till it take
Firm root in earth, and branch with a clear colour.

Let me bear love, not hope, for hope is sick,
Drenched with dark blood and subject to decay;
Illusion after illusion bleeds away;
False hope is hangman—oh but how the tree
Spreads light across light, as though the hour cried out!
The unveiled intensity rends and crowds my heart,
And I no more than a nerve that feels its touch.
Love is the flower of infinite multitudes
And springs from the heart of inescapable loss.
Flower of a bare land, by what difficult way
Shall my unquenchable heart find the oasis?

T. E. F. BLACKBURN

Pentecost

Stretching my hand I touched his absence;
But more terrible, my side opened like a mouth
Vomitting Peter into an empty void
For he had held me as a cup holds living water
And all my power flowed from me when he died.
I remember the faces of my brothers
Drifting and hollow eyed, but no one knew me.
Sometimes these hands were red and once I found
A torn image of Christ wet with my blood and spittle
And all the hair rose trembling on my head.
But who remained and who maintained me,
When Peter dissolved in a host of broken creatures,
His flying ghost overtaken by claws
On the floors of the crowing sea;
Remember the last light of the drowning eyes
And remember the least possible of all miracles
When we who died were reborn from the waters
To that small room whose ceiling dripped with flame.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Epitaph

Mr. Heath-Stubbs as you must understand
Came of a gentleman's family out of Staffordshire
Of as good blood as any in England
But he was wall-eyed and his legs too spare.

His elbows and finger-joints could bend more ways than one
And in frosty weather would creak audibly
As to delight his friends he would give demonstration
Which he might have done in public for a small fee.

Amongst the more learned persons of his time
Having had his schooling in the University of Oxford
In anglosaxon latin ornithology and crime
Yet after four years he was finally not preferred.

Orthodox in beliefs as following the English Church
Barring some heresies he would have for recreation
Yet too often left these sound principles (as I am told)
in the lurch
Being troubled with idleness lechery pride and dissipation.

In his youth he would compose poems in prose and verse
In a classical romantic manner which was pastoral
To which the best judges of the Age were not averse
And the public also but his profit was not financial.

Now having outlived his friends and most of his reputation
He is content to take his rest under these stones and grass
Not expecting but hoping that the Resurrection
Will not catch him unawares whenever it takes place.

EWART MILNE

Not Himself

(*A not-himself, his fondest, closest lover.*—W. J. TURNER)

I've often seen my drowned self in a pool,
And idly taken a twig and splintered his image.
He doesn't worry me much. I call him my Dark Fellow,
And recognize him as I would a road I knew but didn't follow—
A road of sensual foliage where conscience was, at best,
ephemeral—
Whose god was, I suppose, partly Nietzsche, partly Lawrence.
In rage
Of youth my Dark self was always compelling, often
overmastering—
But I didn't cultivate him and now he gazes up at me, drowning.
To be sure there's a blind look about him. Light was not his goal.

But for the other, not myself, who I believe exists, is somewhere,
I wonder about him night and day. He doesn't show in any pool,
And for all I know may be an angel as well as my fondest lover;
But though I peer, and peel off layer after layer
Of selves—and I repeat I believe he exists, is somewhere—
There's always some myself in what I uncover, not him at all.
Still. There's a chance I'll unearth him yet, wherever he's hiding,
But if I do this green-eyed world will go wondering
At a poet who, today, finds in himself another, not-himself,
speaking there.

JOHN WALLER

Keith Douglas

1920–1944

An explorer is how I always think of you
Drawing from emotion a chart and seeking out
New ways to plant a journey; this point
Marked silence and carrion; that was cue

For gay and wasting cities; a third struck dull
Or lonely. And so you gradually withdrew
To the world behind this mirror; you knew
That the image of death was casual, beyond all

Somnolent rivers' and deserts' outcry.
If the times were hot you surely felt
Them cold, ignoring all save the lilt
Of giant horns calling the huntsmen to die.

Cast in the natural mode your answers
Seek to assuage and assure us now,
Torn from the swift eye and calm brow
So that all your dangers become dancers.

MADGE HALES

Cocktail Party

His face was a world in question:
the untented eyes augured for a sign
in blue speech and ice-like spoke
of the red fire and woke my sleeping embers.

His slow breadth had the protracted stillness
of a Fen in snow, his limb's ease
only seemed to slumber and at me
the white tool of teeth in coral embarked.

His spatulate hands helped conclusions:
blue-pitted of coal and grape-smear of ring,
lending an animal sense to my eye
that stroked the articulate wave of his hair.

His strength was his weakness, proud flesh
feeling my delicate probe of words
till the hour was responsive as lover's eyes:
but the fixed time went with no love spoken.

VERNON SCANNELL

She is a Whore, my Muse

She is a whore, my muse,
And comes hot and randy as the sun
At unpropitious hours.
When sleep would pack me snug in warm black wool
She'll say,
'Get up old fool and play awhile with me.'

Or when the righteous day
Sings out all honest labouring men
I'll find her by my side
Importunate in crowded railway train
Saying,
'I'll drink your blushes to the bone.'

Her kiss is lash, her touch
Commands impossibles and she exacts
Exorbitant fee of round
And silver hours, vast feeds of flesh and sweat.
She leaves
Me token of a white exhaustion.

She comes as she desires;
She never tells of star-blind nightingales
Or moon-wild wanderers
And yet, when it would seem that she'll not come
Ever again
My heart bleeds beads of prayer for her return.

T. A. R. HYNDMAN

James Joyce and the Ploughman

Remembering one owned
By the soil of the world,
Yet mine, my own
In particular.
My surly heart,
The gulls await
A cloudless valiant
Day when the human
Jungle's icy centre thaws.
The woods release.

A miracle rests a joyous arm
Warm on the neck of Justice.
Exiles, gulls and all mad lovers
Can sing and soar like skylarks.
The chosen lonely dispossessed
Unitedly fly higher.
Higher home.

PIERRE REVERDY

On the Slope

The waning twilight shuts a door
We are by the roadside in the shade
Close to the stream where nothing stirs

If there is still a light
The path sets out towards infinity

The water rises like a spray
Silence shuts in the night

(translated by Alec Smith)

APOLLINAIRE

THE nineteenth-century revolt of the individual against society reached its literary climax in the works of Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Jarry; the Symbolists, and especially Mallarmé, no longer revolted—politely but firmly they shut the door on the *profanum vulgus*. Apollinaire, who was twenty in 1900, may well be considered the first of the modern poets; no less revolutionary as a craftsman than Rimbaud, he was yet his spiritual opposite. Nor had he much in common with Mallarmé; for not only did he open the door again, but cordially invited everyone to enter. While Rimbaud did his best to sever his own roots, to cut himself off from society, Apollinaire, already uprooted, desired only to profit by his environment, to become rooted in it. As the illegitimate son of an unknown father, as a Pole born in Italy and educated in France, he was well fitted for the historic, as well as the poetic function of pioneer; whether he liked it or not, he was a 'modern' from the start, a child of the twentieth century, a cosmopolitan and a *déraciné*. What is more, he was well aware of his special significance.

Hommes de l'avenir souvenez-vous de moi
Je vivais a l'époque où finissaient les rois.

Ever since Baudelaire, few problems have troubled artists as much as that of tradition and innovation, and of the relationship between these two. Baudelaire scorned the idea of progress, abhorred the machine and ridiculed democracy; but as a poet he had no choice but to draw nourishment from his hated surroundings—the alternative was academic anaemia. His personal solution of the problem—which had not yet become a dilemma—was to apply a classical technique to subject matter which his contemporaries found disturbingly modern; by doing so, he arrived at a new kind of beauty, the beauty of discord and incongruity. His hatred had undergone a magical transformation; by becoming creative, it had acquired all the characteristics of love.

Apollinaire drew his own conclusions from this paradox. Instead of revolting against the age, or despising it, he embraced it eagerly, cried out for more speed, more mechanization and for a poetry that would correspond to these developments—experimental poetry. Instead of furnishing his poetic workshop only with exquisite and useless antiques, he went to the opposite extreme, collected anything and everything that came his way and tried to put it to some use. 'How vulgar!' the aesthete will

protest; but vulgarity is not quite the right word—naîvety is more like it, and Apollinaire's naîvety was his strength. Because of this quality—so rare in contemporary poets—he could be as fantastic as he liked, as extravagant as he liked, and get away with it, just as he could be outrageously bohemian and yet remain capable of being a good soldier and a good husband. There is an analogy between bohemianism in life and experiment in art; both, like beautiful fungi, can thrive only as long as they have something to feed on, conventions which, however rotten, are still moderately reliable; when this pasture is exhausted, so are the fungi. Here the simile ends; for a wretched fungus cannot leave its favourite patch of corruption and settle on healthier soil, while artists, even if they cannot strike physical roots, can strike metaphysical ones on a chosen site. Apollinaire's naîvety saved him from the fate of the fungus; it was the soil to which he could always return—rich, ancient and inexhaustible. Having great faith in the secular values, it was comparatively easy for him to do without an orthodox religion.

'La surprise est le plus grand ressort nouveau,' Apollinaire wrote in an essay; his enthusiasm for the 'new spirit' was such that he felt called upon to disprove the dictum of Ecclesiastes: 'There is nothing new under the sun'. His objection was that Solomon 'liked novelty so well that his concubines were without number'—not a very convincing argument, but characteristic of Apollinaire. (A cynic would say that Solomon's varied experience in this field merely proves that he was qualified to make such a statement.) Apollinaire's poetry is full of surprises, but only because it is otherwise simple and so gives the reader confidence; and Apollinaire was fortunate enough to live at a time when there was still a public both able and willing to be surprised. When surprises cease to be effective—and they rarely are for long—they become unbearably tedious, more so than the stalest of platitudes. Apollinaire's surprises, however, have worn well; when he writes

Et moi j'ai le coeur aussi gros
Qu'un cul de dame damascène

one cannot help admiring the wit and the rightness of the comparison. His unconventional use of rhyme, too, still has the charm of the unexpected:

Te voici à Amsterdam avec une jeune fille que tu
trouves belle et qui est laide
Elle doit se marier avec un étudiant de Leyde.

Apollinaire knew instinctively how far he could go in the way of experiment without ceasing to be a lyrical poet; even his free verse—except where it is purely descriptive, as in parts of *Un Fantôme de Nuées*—is lyrical, song-like. His manifesto *L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes*, though full of praise for the new age and the kind of poetry that will do justice to it, shows a certain awareness of the dangers. The Dadaists, who developed many of Apollinaire's ideas but discredited them by their excesses, should have read his manifesto more carefully. 'A cosmopolitan lyric expression,' he warns, 'would only yield shapeless works without character or individual structure . . . This synthesis of the arts which has been consummated in our time must not degenerate into confusion.' In the same essay he wrote: 'I think it wrong that a poem should be composed simply of the imitation of a noise to which no lyric, tragic or pathetic meaning can be attached.' Apollinaire himself—like Villon, to whom he has often been compared—could be crudely realistic, ribald or ironic without breaking the emotional tension of his poem. Tradition and innovation, simplicity and ingenuity are happily balanced in his work; if he had only experimented, his poems would not move us as they do thirty-two years after his death.

Occasionally his resemblance to older poets suggests pastiche, as in *La Cueillette*, with its echoes of Ronsard:

Nous vînmes au jardin fleuri peur la cueillette.
Belle, sais-tu combien de fleurs, de roses-thé,
Roses pâles d'amour qui couronnent ta tête,
S'effeuillent chaque été?

But such exercises are rare.

Apollinaire was always on bad terms with time; while he preserved a sentimental attachment to the Catholic Church, he could not accept any dogma. Inevitably, his hedonism gave him an acute awareness of time, its enemy. He could exclaim with some cause 'Je suis ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers'; this line is usually cited in connection with eulogies of Apollinaire's enormous appetite for living, but most critics seem to forget that a cosmic drunkenness is likely to produce a cosmic hangover. Both are very conspicuous in Apollinaire's work; the theme of disillusionment recurs as frequently as that of joyous elation, especially in the form of farewells to youth, such as the one in a late poem, *Vitam Impendere Amori*:

O ma jeunesse abandonnée
Comme une guirlande fanée

Voici que s'en vient la saison
Et des dédains et du soupçon.

A single poem written shortly before his death, *La Jolie Rousse*, conveys a new effect, that of complete sobriety; with the frankness and the humility which were among his greatest virtues, the poet sums up his achievement and asks the reader to pardon his limitations:

Me voici devant tous un homme plein de sens
Connaissant la vie et de la mort ce qu'un vivant
peut connaître
Ayant éprouvé les douleurs et les joies de l'amour
Ayant su quelquefois imposer ses idées
Connaissant plusieurs langages
Ayant pas mal voyagé
Ayant vu la guerre dans l'Artillerie et l'Infanterie
Blessé à tête trépané sous le chloroforme
Ayant perdu ses meilleurs amis dans l'effroyable lutte
Je sais d'ancien et de nouveau autant qu'un homme
seul pourrait des deux savoir

. . . . .

Soyez indulgents quand vous nous comparez
A ceux qui furent la perfection de l'ordre
Nous qui quêtons partout l'aventure . . .

Apollinaire was right to stress his knowledge both of the old and the new; it was his love and understanding of both that made him a true twentieth-century poet but saved him from the plight of many later ones. Though he glorified the technical age, he did so with a zest and an ingenuousness which that age has almost succeeded in destroying; his aeroplanes, for instance, are mythical birds and his vision of them is child-like. Above all, he was still capable of experiencing life directly and spontaneously, without the help of other people's books, just as he could communicate his experience in a language both musical and intelligible.

Apart from the French text, the best thing about the recent edition of Apollinaire's *Selected Writings** is the introduction, which is informative and thoughtful. Some forty poems are included; these are well chosen, but one regrets that parts of *Vendémiaire and Les Collines*, two of Apollinaire's finest poems, have been omitted. It is difficult to see any justification for cutting

**Guillaume Apollinaire:* Selected Writings, Edited by Roger Shattuck, Harvill Press, 12s.6d.

these poems, which are neither very long nor of unequal quality. Most of the poems chosen are from *Alcools* and *Calligrammes*, but there are extracts from *Le Bestiaire* (1911), the whole of the poem *Vitam Impendere Amori* (1917) and a few pieces from the posthumous volumes. An English version faces the texts. Lastly there is an English translation of *L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes*, of three extracts from the novel *Le Poète Assassiné* and of other prose works, but without the French originals.

In a prefatory note, Mr. Shattuck writes that 'the verse translations herein should be able to stand alone as poems in the English language'; were it not for the ambiguous 'should', this claim would be rather presumptuous. To begin with, he has translated songs like *La Chanson du Mal-Aimé* and *A la Santé* without reproducing the rhyme, on which their lyrical flow and much of their novelty depend; nor does he always preserve the metres of such poems. For example, the effect of the last line of *A la Santé* is weakened by the feminine ending of 'reason'.

When he needs an odd syllable, he stuffs in some meaningless adjective, 'putrid' for straw, 'sweet' for bird, 'little' for girl, 'fond' for youth, etc. He succeeds a little better with free verse, though he seems to have little feeling for rhythms of any kind. All that can be said in favour of his versions is that they are accurate and should help English readers to enjoy the originals; but even that is a respectable achievement.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER

CRAFTSMANSHIP, INTEGRITY AND PASSION

It is eleven years since Yeats died and seventeen since his *Collected Poems* were last reprinted. Much water has flowed down the Liffey meanwhile and carried not a few poetic reputations with it. But time has not touched that bare sinuosity of style, those subtly modified speech-rhythms, that unified 'metaphysical' sensibility that distinguish the poetry of the later Yeats from that of his lesser imitators and set it, with Eliot's, in the forefront of the verse of our day. Now, with the publication of the definitive edition of these *Collected Poems* (Macmillan, 15s.) to include the lyrics from *A Full Moon in March* and *Last Poems*, we are given an opportunity of seeing in perspective the whole range and development of his non-dramatic poetry over fifty years: from *Crossways* (1889) to the posthumous *Last Poems* (1940). And three recently published books, Norman

Jeffares' *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet,*[1] Richard Ellmann's *Yeats: The Man and the Masks,*[2] and above all, Donald A. Stauffer's brilliant critical study of the poetry, *The Golden Nightingale,*[3] have materially added to our knowledge and deepened our capacity for an understanding re-assessment of it.

In the first place, the influence of Maud Gonne on Yeats's life and—far more important for us—on his poetry, is now known in something like its fullness. Early poems of the 'Rose' cycle are now seen to be not merely idealistic abstractions, apostrophes of Romantic Ireland dead and gone, but a fusion of the highly personal with the objective that we have been accustomed to look for only in the later work. Her influence is persistent and all-pervasive. Outside the poems inspired by Lady Gregory, her circle and her setting, there are few indeed of his greater poems that escape her influence until the period of *A Vision.*

This personal element in the early 'dream' poetry does not, of course, excuse its weaknesses: lusciousness, vagueness of diction, lack of formal tautness. But it does provide a connecting thread between the earlier and the later work, persisting through the sombre aridity of *The Green Helmet* (1910) and the bare, 'un-poetic' vigour of *Responsibilities* (1914). It does reveal in the whole a steady growth and unity that is still, perhaps, too little apprehended. Critics have been too ready to see in Yeats and in Eliot a dichotomy; a conflict between the early and the later work which does not, in fact, exist. Change and development there are, in the way of tautening rhythms and flexibility of technique; but there is no 'fresh start'.

Three things above all saved Yeats from engulfment in the fate of many of his lesser contemporaries: craftsmanship, and passion, and his utter integrity in both. The first was his touchstone even in the '90s amid the feverish eroticism of Dowson, Symons and his other companions of The Rhymers' Club. 'Words alone are certain good,' is an affirmation in the first poem reprinted here, and it was a maxim that sustained him even through the evocative luxuriance of his 'Innisfree' days. Already by 1904, in *Adam's Curse* (p.88), he is the fully conscious craftsman:

> *'I said "A line will take us hours maybe;*
> *Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,*
> *Our stitching and unstitching has been naught'*

and by *The Green Helmet* (1910) the sensuous floridity of an 1899 poem like *The Travail of Passion* (p.78) has given way to

[1] Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949 [2 & 3] Macmillan, 1949

The Fascination of What's Difficult (p.104). He complains how, for a time, that 'fascination' had '. . . drained the sap out of my veins' and certainly in that volume and the next there is in general a certain emotional sterility, about which we have spoken, that is not to be detected elsewhere in his verse either before or since. We are indebted to Dr. Jeffares for showing how biographical factors, especially Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903 and Yeats's reaction to it, contributed to their bitter bleakness.

In *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) his emphasis on craftsmanship, as for example in *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory* (p.148), remains unabated. In it he acclaims

> *. . . that stern colour and that delicate line*
> *That are our secret discipline*
> *Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might;*

and, in fact, from *A Coat* (p.142) in *Responsibilities* to Pt. V of *Under Ben Bulben*—'Irish poets, learn your trade'—(p.400), one of the last things he wrote, he relentlessly scorned the facile, the meretricious and, not least, the cheap imitators of his early floridity. But in this *Wild Swans* volume the sap is flowing again. Amid the poems born of his friendship for Lady Gregory recur nostalgic apostrophes of Maud Gonne from which now all bitterness has departed.

Yet it is not, of course, only in relation to Maud Gonne that Yeats's poetry is rooted in his life; much of that poetry is political. But even here the shadow of Maud is reflected in his more active participation—though still with some reservations—in the cause always dear to him as an ideal, of Irish Nationalism, in the hopes of winning her love thereby. Out of the tension, first between his aspirations and her refusal, and later between the persistence of his longing and the realization that old age had overaken them both, much of his greatest poetry was born. All the pathos and poignancy of constant but unsatisfied love stretches between the two 'dream' poems beginning 'Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths' (1899: p.81) and 'There is grey in your hair' (1919: p.172). And between them, too, stretches the story of Yeats's development as a poet: his gradual shedding of adjectival excess and vague, aureate imagery and diction; his emergence from an ascetic, idealistic nostalgia into an agonised, passionate lament for all that he has missed in body as well as in mind: a realization that the balance is achieved, as he says in *Among School Children* (p.242), only where

> *The body is not bruised to pleasure soul;*

a line that echoes Donne's warning that

Else a great Prince in prison lies

—the Donne whom he now (p.157) proudly acclaims as a kindred spirit.

The companions he chooses in that poem*—Landor and Donne—are, it is true, an indication in themselves of a certain exclusiveness and detachment that always persisted in him. Yet if he remained, for the most part, physically just outside the mêlée, he was a passionate observer; and the story of his development is the story of his removal from his Ivory Tower of the '90s to his Armed Citadel of the '20s and '30s. Perhaps, except for a brief period when his belief in an ideal peasantry interested in the legends of heroic Ireland was shattered, he never inhabited that Ivory Tower of legend at all. Certainly the poems centring on Lady Gregory and on the threat to, and ultimate destruction of, all that Coole represents, find him passionately committed to certain ideals of the aristocratic way of life and a scorn for the democratic process levelling all in a grey mediocrity. 'There are only three classes I respect' he exclaimed one day, quoting Balzac, 'the aristocracy who are above fear; the poor who are beneath it; and the artists whom God has made reckless.' And for him this was always true.

Yet the Irish Senator, the Nobel Prize-winner, the lecturer to large audiences in America, could make no pretence to being a private figure. Nevertheless, he built for himself a private world; a private world out of which, paradoxically, was born the bare, realistic poetry of his later years with its involvement in the contemporary scene. If his love for Maud Gonne was the framework within which much of his best poetry lay, there was also another. Begotten of his early interest in Theosophy and spiritualistic communication, and aided by the apparently psychic qualities of Miss Hyde-Lees, whom he married in 1917, came the gradual synthesis of that private world, in 1925, in *A Vision.* Within the orbit of its precise symbols of reference—the cones, the gyres, the phases of the moon—and their subsequent poetic interpretation, is to be found most of Yeats's poetry, outside the spheres of Maud Gonne's and Lady Gregory's influence, destined to endure. It includes the magnificent Byzantium poems and—among his greatest achievements—*The Second Coming.*

If Yeats detested democracy it was for the dark anarchy to which he feared it led; it was the chaos of Bolshevism that pro-

* "To a Young Beauty"

duced that reaction in Yeats towards Fascist doctrines that many critics have noticed; and in *The Second Coming* (p.210) he tells his darkest foreboding of a world where all

> *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*
> *Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*
> *The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere*
> *The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*
> *The best lack all conviction, while the worst*
> *Are full of passionate intensity.*

Here is his stern and simple answer to all who speak of his Ivory Tower.

Yet with all his own 'passionate intensity' he remained always a somewhat lonely figure. He was never 'a good mixer' like his friend, A.E., in the hurly-burly of Irish politics; and his integrity was of that austere kind that would brook no concessions (Cf. his terse refusal 'To a Poet who would have me praise certain bad poets, imitators of his and mine' (p.105) and *A Coat* already referred to). To be a poet of the Young Ireland League was to him no recommendation unless you were also a good poet; and for this integrity he paid a most bitter price: not only in popularity but—what was infinitely dearer to him—in the loss of Maud Gonne perhaps just because he was not prepared to waive his scruples and put the cause of Irish Nationalism always unquestionably first.

Yet it is for that very integrity, for his craftsmanship, and for his vibrant passion that future generations will honour him. Of that passion, no less of body than of mind, of soul than of body, sufficient has been said. All his work up to the end increasingly explores its range, depth and complexity—as so many of *Last Poems* readily reveal. And his craftsmanship could be no more than touched on in a short article. Yet two points may be slightly elaborated: the subtle modulation of his later rhythms, influenced by, but much more influencing, his younger contemporaries in the '30s; and his use of the accumulative or developing symbol linking stanza to stanza, poem to poem, and even book to book. Apart from the specifically esoteric imagery of 'cones', and 'gyres' from *A Vision*, the Rose, the swan, and even water are examples of such accumulative symbols; and we owe a debt to Dr. Stauffer for his detailed exposition of some of them in *The Golden Nightingale* and for his minute analysis of some of Yeat's most famous lyrics. And the power that informed alike craftsmanship and passion was that superb integrity. That Yeats had his affectations,

his occasional poses and self-dramatizations no one will gainsay; but beneath them all was an unflinching honesty of purpose and design that was absolutely incorruptible.

Integrity will not make a man a great poet; but genius is incomplete without it. That Yeats had poetic genius few will at this day deny; and this book is its enduring witness. But the guarantee of authenticity in all his best work is just that note of integrity. He paid no heed to the time-server or the propagandist, but wrote what his heart dictated, regardless of the cost. That is why future generations will turn increasingly, and with full confidence, to his collected work as a well-spring of major poetry, because, through all the years, he gave

not what they would,
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

HERMANN PESCHMANN

THE POETRY OF WREY GARDINER

It is a curious phenomenon that a few poets seem to leap into the poetic limelight almost with their first books (often without adequate reason, if one is to judge by the initial achievement), while others continue to write and to have their work published for many years without attracting any serious attention. The poems of Wrey Gardiner have been appearing in reputable periodicals and anthologies for over ten years, and though several critics have briefly commented upon their quality, only one has, to my knowledge, attempted any kind of assessment or interpretation. It may be that Gardiner's editorial functions or even his autobiographical volumes of experimental prose have, to some extent, obscured his poetic development, but it seems to me that there are certain aspects of his poetry which merit a more comprehensive study. If, in a single essay of this length, it is impracticable for me to do full justice to his poetry, I hope, at least, to indicate some of the directions in which such a study might advantageously be pursued.

Although I must acknowledge my debt to Mr. Derek Stanford for his critical exposition in *The Freedom of Poetry*, I am unable to accept without strong reservations his description of this poet as 'one who desires to keep a little cigarette-smoke between himself and the jostling world.' It is true that Gardiner frequently

(more frequently in his prose) expresses the need for solitude, to escape from the 'clock-faced citizens' or his 'insensible brothers'. 'It becomes increasingly obvious,' he remarks, 'that to revolt against the tyranny of daily life is the only thing to do. When one sees the awful faces, the comic clothes, the frightful and boring habits of contemporary humanity, some negative avoiding action must be taken.' Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to over-emphasize these outbursts or to use them in any way as the basis for critical theories. For the poet it is essential to have periods of withdrawal from the world of actual events in order to renew his contract with what is, for him, the only reality:

And to live again we must be alone in
The struggle, suffer the separate and know the wound,
The lightning leap of the tiger in the striped
And irregular dark of the unknown.

If the poet finds that his privacy is being encroached upon or that he is becoming increasingly concerned with the mechanism rather than the creative processes of life, he is subjected to moods of intense frustration. But it is an experience common to most writers, particularly those who are compelled to devote a substantial part of each day to tasks which bear little relation to art or literature, and as such can be discounted. As Wrey Gardiner has been influenced in his prose by Henry Miller, we should not be surprised when he gives voice to his resentment in a somewhat forceful manner.

In his poetry, however, he constantly reveals a preoccupation with both the problems of mankind in general and those of man as individual. His attitude is not indeed that of the aesthete protesting against the evils of a scientific and materialistic age, and seeking through art his own salvation in a haven of ideal beauty, but that of a humanist revolted by the cruelty, indifference and lack of vision around him. There *is* an aesthetic streak in his temperament but it never disturbs his understanding of ordinary human emotions and necessities. In an early poem he writes:

Words, words, are men never tired of words,
The froth and glitter of the azure foam?
Give us the thing, the unshadowed sympathy of the hand,
The visceral heart movement of nerve and guts,
And as the images fall like the brittle leaves
Reach down into the dark centre of all our hopes.

What may appear to be a smoke-screen deliberately erected by

the poet is, in fact, a sense of isolation which has its roots in his childhood, a result of his psychological environment. It is enlightening to observe that he speaks of *suffering* the 'separate' and knowing 'the wound'. The separation is something he endures and is caused by an inhibition in direct conflict with his explicit desire for communion with those 'who have lived with pity, and in whose eyes/I have caught the leaping light.' And as the poet moves closer to the reality of his own intuitive vision—achieving, incidentally, a firmer control of his material—his sense of isolation is gradually being overcome. In one of his later poems, perhaps his most outstanding, *Lament for Strings,* he is able to identify himself with his fellow-victims in a manner which suggests a new orientation:

> *And in this song we hear earth's song,*
> *The echo in the distance, the lily in the mirror*
> *Of the lake, the torch at midnight in the garden.*
> *And in the realization that all men are ourselves*
> *And that we suffer the torture of the dying enemy*
> *In silence, knowing that we have crucified ourselves,*
> *The thorn will flower on the hillside in spring,*
> *The tide turn with the unseen movement of the moon.*

The last line of the above quotation has a greater relevance than is immediately apparent. 'Our thoughts and emotions are often but spray flung up from hidden tides that follow a moon no eye can see,' said Yeats, and the interpretation of Wrey Gardiner's poetry, in its widest sense, is largely a matter of tracing thought and emotion back to the hidden tides of the subconscious. The philosophy to which Gardiner has so often owned allegiance is decidedly misleading to the critic and I do not think it can be reconciled with the interior laws or the organic pattern of his poetry. He is still trying to convince himself of the validity of an early theory that the world outside him is simply the reflection of his own wish, that he creates it, as it were, as a coextension of his own mind. Now, while subscribing to this theory on the intellectual plane, he does not accept it intuitively, as his work shows; and because he is fundamentally an intuitive poet, a major conflict is set up which has yet to be resolved. Consequently, in spite of his would-be self-sufficiency, there are continual references to the outside world over which he has no control—'the lost thin note of the unseen bird', 'the lost figure among the trees', 'the lost truth', 'the lost forgotten land', or 'the island seen in the distance'. *Emblem* is a truer self-portrait than he realizes:

Because I cannot ever remember
The lost word, the last endeavour,
Because I am indifferent to the splendour
Of all these words, but look towards the ending,
The buried petal of the individual rose.

Because I lean towards a lapse of learning,
Towards the unpremeditation of the clown,
I am the fool of time . . .

but it is precisely when he fails to obey the dictates of his poetic impulse and attempts to force his raw material into the mould of an alien philosophy that he writes: 'beside the mark, the subtle aim,/Losing the impenetrable ego in the dream.' A perfect example of this defect can be found in *The Gates of Silence*, his longest poem to date. In this poem, unusual of its kind, he is preoccupied with the relationship between man (man the artist or poet, in particular) and society, between man and a standard of creative values—'Why are men separate, not knowing/What passes in the other room?' The theme is successfully developed and the imagery eminently suitable to the evocative atmosphere created by his treatment of the subject. Yet in Section VI there are three stanzas and another stanza in Section VII which immediately strike a false note and which, for me at least, are entirely out of harmony with the remainder of the poem, in quality, rhythm and clarity of perception. It is almost as if the lines had been inserted as an afterthought merely to introduce his intellectual theory.

Without implying any similarity of style or outlook, an interesting parallel can be drawn between the early experience of W. B. Yeats, and that of Wrey Gardiner. Just as Yeats, in revolt against the rationalism of his father and unable to accept what appeared to be the exploded tenets of Christianity, felt compelled to search for a comprehensive philosophy with which he could relate his own vague conceptions of a new ritualistic Order, so Gardiner has groped his way through a half-light of his own in the hope of finding a system of symbols adequate for the purpose of communicating his peculiar experience. It was, in both cases a search for a personal myth. Like Yeats, Gardiner spent several years studying astrology, occultism and psychical research. He lived for some time in France and, again like Yeats, has been strongly influenced by the theories and techniques of the French Symbolists and has modified them to his own requirements. There the parallel ceases. For Wrey

Gardiner there was no ready-made framework of symbols, such as that of the Celtic Twilight, available. Nor could he follow Eliot into anthropology and the legends of *From Ritual to Romance* and the Holy Grail, though he has made use of the latter in the same way that he has adapted the traditional symbols of Christianity.

His development as a poet can be seen in clearer perspective against this background. It might, with some truth, be argued that his task of creating a myth, valid in its implications both for himself and also for his generation, is common to all those contemporary poets who have rejected an external authority, religious or otherwise. But in Gardiner's case, it is something more than a poetic task; it is, one might say, an instinctive need, because only through a myth of this kind, which will enable him to 'bridge the unbridgeable', can he achieve a personal integration:

The last word of poets is not their pity
But the permanent light of the illuminating word,
The very simple understanding of the poor and sad,
The bread and wine on the bare table of the good,
For the time has come to turn from the pasteboard past
To the direct simplicity of the child's stare
That sees the dream projected in the quiet night,
Holding our hands in a darkening world.

And because it is an instinctive rather than an intellectual need one finds that he makes no deliberate effort to erect a mythological structure to contain his poems, as some of the Apocalyptic poets, faced with a similar difficulty, were liable to do. That he is too acutely conscious of social problems and human potentialities to accept aestheticism is confirmed by his interest in Social Credit and Anarchism. On the other hand, his personal values have not been subordinated to any political idea. Unassimilated politics do not obtrude upon his poetry. He recognizes that

The pure line of the partisan is the dangerous division
Between the love of love and the love of death . . .

In the absence of a more convincing ideal, he is induced, at times, by the 'desire of union with one who is the reflection' of his wish to pin his faith to a private love—

We who are lovers are the equals of death . . .

Love is the last and dearest triumph over night . . .

but, in a more realistic vein, is aware that 'the lover who seeks and has found too often love/Or the other thing, the heartbeat of the animal in the night' deludes himself with a fugitive satisfaction.

These changing attitudes, like his conceptualism, are merely the manipulation of ideas, flotsam drifting on the surface to which the poet clutches temporarily, only to abandon because they will not entirely support his intuitive beliefs. His best poems can be enjoyed at more than one level; to fully understand his work it is necessary to penetrate to the lower depths from which his symbols draw their imaginative power. In *The Dark Thorn* Gardiner provides us with a clue. 'The truth,' he says, 'is not all earthward. It has its islands lost on the edge of the sea.

A careful study of his poems, from the earliest to the latest, will reveal, first a strange dreamlike atmosphere (except when he is denouncing the 'greater pig-faced public'), and second, a persistent background of coastline, sea and islands. As an antithesis to Eliot's *Waste Land,* with its symbols of fire and water, we discover a mythological stretch of country within easy reach of the sea; a littoral inhabited by such figures as the Enigma, the Angel, the lost Wanderer, the Child, the Virgin, the Uneasy Stranger, the Beggar, the Lover and the Haunter of Graves, each of which possesses a two-fold significance—operating within the defined limits of the poem and, at the same time, adding to the mythological picture of the whole body of work—and changing slightly in their relationship to each other. The context of the poem indicates the immediate value to be given to the separate figures but the ultimate value cannot be determined without reference to other poems, some of which may yet have to be written. The principal antagonist is Time, 'the harpy, stealer of delight,' who assumes various guises, animate and inanimate, from poem to poem, and his allies are History, the iron men, 'the dead who wait', and the many ghosts 'who know we cannot last/Beyond the hard light of our fearful day.' Perhaps the most significant, certainly the most recurrent, characters of all and whom I take to represent four attributes of the poet himself, his four Zoas, so to speak, are the Saint (or seer), the Fool, the Madman and the Dancer, all explicable in archetypal and symbolical terms. The islands, always forbidden, lost or seen in the distance, represent quite obviously 'the lost truth' the poet seeks, 'the quiet answer that sets all at nought.' I regret that my space is insufficient for me to provide a more detailed analysis of these and other symbols in Gardiner's poetry or to elaborate upon the

emergence of a private myth; in any case, until more of his work is published, no proper assessment of its effectiveness can be made, for each poem seems to extend both the scope and interaction of the symbols he uses.

Technically, his poems can be grouped into three periods: the early work, including poems written prior to 1940, consisting of occasional pieces, delicate seascapes and the like, in the traditional manner; the poems of 1940/43; and the poems included in his last book, *Lament for Strings* (1947). The sudden change in style about 1940 may partly have been due to the impact of war, but the influence of T. S. Eliot, Alex Comfort and Dylan Thomas can be traced to the work of this period. With *Lament for Strings* there is distinct advance, both in construction and rhythm. The rich accumulations of poetic phrases which characterized and often weakened his earlier poems have largely been excised, though occasionally they are still to be encountered, as in *Prayer for a Wanderer*. Few poets have assimilated Eliot's work so successfully; Gardiner's style is now so individual that his poems can be recognized in any collection. His handling of the lyric has often been remarked, but it is not sufficiently appreciated that most of his shorter poems virtually comprise a long sequence, loosely connected it may be, yet gathering a cumulative strength from one poem to the next through the deployment of recognizable symbols. His future development will depend, I think, upon his ability not only to give internal coherence to what is still an incomplete private myth, but also to extend its validity to the experience of others.

HOWARD SERGEANT

DELAYED TRIBUTE

The Old Knight by HERBERT PALMER (Dent, 7s. 6d.). *Collected Poems* by ROY CAMPBELL (The Bodley Head, 15s.).

REVIEW of these books comes late in the day, and apologies are therefore due to the poets. In one sense, however, their tardy notice here is of little significance: there are poems by both of them in these volumes which will carry them unaided through time.

In *The Old Knight* Mr. Palmer discovers a fierce new lyrical lease of life. A second wind of inspiration blows animatedly

through these pages. The best of them, like his piece for William Blake, reveal a gay, compelling fusion of the colloquial and the magniloquent: the grand manner unembuskined, so to speak. Mr. Palmer has always had a gift for the expression of indignation, but only now has he learnt to heat his kettle without it boiling turbulently over.

I strove with all, for all were worth my strife—
Nature they had consumed, and truth and Art.
I warmed my fingers on the ash of life.
It cools. But I'm too angry to depart.

The bardic bravado of this poet is an almost proverbial matter. What is fresh is his terseness of statement and keen economy of attack. Mr. Palmer, incidentally, was one of the first appreciative critics of the next poet under review.

Mr. Campbell might be described as a poet of colour, not technicolour. Compare the restrained intensity of

The firing ceased and like a wounded foe
The day bled out in crimson; wild and high
A far hyena sent his voice of woe
Tingling in faint hysteria through the sky.

with the ineffectual floral violence of Dunstan Thompson or George Barker. His poem, *The Albatross* especially should be read. Outside of Dylan Thomas's *Long-legged Bait* there is nothing in English poetry which comes so close to the continual vision of Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre* as this piece. (Henry Treece's poem, *The Boat,* is a temperance pleasure-cruise in contrast.)

And for those who believe that Mr. Campbell is a poet of bombast and fury, alien to any subject requiring the employment of a still small voice, I would recommend a reading of his poem, *Silence.*

Finally, it should be added that Mr. Campbell does not regard the arrangement of this volume with complete approval; and regrets the omission of certain poems, including a favourite piece to his wife.

DEREK STANFORD

EMANUEL LITVINOFF: A JEWISH POET

EMANUEL LITVINOFF is the first avowedly Jewish poet of interest to write in English. For to be a Jewish poet means more than to produce poetry that is pervaded by an Old Testament fury or by a certain prophetic quality; rather it is to accept a unique situational predicament, a fugitive otherness resulting from an historical tradition of exile. Nobody could classify Siegfried Sassoon as a Jewish poet, while Isaac Rosenburg too failed to appreciate this otherness.

The Jew, as artist, exhibits certain peculiar traits relative to his racial character apart from those arising from his specific position in an alien society. It amounts to more than a lyrical sentimentality and a sharp satirical tone so well in evidence, say, in the works of Heine, or in the modern Hebrew poets, Nathan Alterman and David Shimoni. Perhaps its spirit can best be recognized in the canvases of that Jewish poet of paint, Marc Chagall, who expresses the whole weird movement and joy of existence outside an almost unbearable core of sadness. From his brush flows the Jewish wit, the Jewish mockery, the Jewish sentimentality and the Jewish protest. It is all there on the canvas for the world to see—a Jewish soul, joyful and tragic, smelling of the sensual earth and dusty Sabbaths.

Emanuel Litvinoff is author of two books of poems: *The Untried Soldier*, published in 1942, and *A Crown for Cain* in 1948. The reaction to his first book by the reviewers and critics was dramatic and laudatory, whereas his second book of poems received for the most part an unfavourable or apathetic response. Yet, looking at both books dispassionately, *A Crown for Cain* unmistakably shows a progression in maturity of craft and concept. Indeed *The Untried Soldier* is too emotional, too naked, too uncontrolled and embarrassing for the sophisticated reader. Through distance a more true assessment of this first book of Litvinoff's can be made, and we can only deplore a 'hay-wire' exaggerated standard of criticism which was so apparent during the war years, and which has since done irreparable harm to modern poetry. For a potential public was destroyed by the recommendations of befogged critics who were perhaps inwardly afraid that the poet they were reviewing might in the next instant be killed at the Front. Again, the urgent atmosphere of war, the persistent journalist cry of 'Where are the war poets?', the overwhelming spate of poetry books released by the publishers,—all

helped to stampede critical standards and so ultimately puzzle what was a willing and sincere audience.

The Untried Soldier did, however, reveal a young mind with a strong social passion and a manner rich in sensual fury and feeling. Its themes were common to those of the war poets in general: sexual and social frustration, isolation, nostalgia, protest, death and the pity of it all. The poets of the recent war approached more closely the mood of Wilfred Owen than that of Rupert Brooke. But where Emanuel Litvinoff differed from his contemporaries was in that he alone was a Jew—a Jew consciously Jewish.

A Crown for Cain is divided into two, and the first part is named *The Thorn of Conscience.* Ostensibly it is concerned with the soldier who has committed the blood of his brother to the anonymity of the fields and waters. Emanuel Litvinoff has identified himself with Cain and though the war is over, and the act of murder accomplished, the guilt and the thorn of conscience persist. Yet looking deeper a more intrinsic conflict may be observed, a conflict which is of a peculiarly individual nature. It is of credit to the poet that he has endowed it with a more universal significance.

Perhaps an elementary knowledge of a writer's personal history is of help to the critic and reader. It is known that Emanuel Litvinoff was born in the East End of London thirty-five years ago into, presumably, an orthodox Jewish house. He writes as a Jewish poet. Yet between the publication of *The Untried Soldier* and *A Crown for Cain* it may be learnt that he married out of his faith. And it may be remarked that this act is exceptional in that type of person who has had an essentially orthodox Jewish upbringing. I believe this act to be significant for the complete understanding of his poetry. Further it may be noted that *A Crown for Cain* is dedicated to the memory of his mother. And by this comment I intend no psycho-analytical slur. But the problem of inter-marriage and dual loyalties is a very real one to the Jew living in a Christian society. Many Jews indeed deny their Judaism actively and accept Christianity as a living faith. The Jew, even in England, has to suffer his humiliations and there are many comfortable considerations to induce a man to identify himself with the dominant group ideal.

That Emanuel Litvinoff was attracted to Christianity (not consciously) is apparent even in *The Untried Soldier.* Perhaps it is no accident that he writes: 'I am twelve Jews, I am Matthew, I am Luke,' rather than 'I am Abraham, I am Moses.' It is only in the

first part of *A Crown for Cain* that this particular conflict assumes more gigantic proportions. The dual affiliation of a Jew to Israel and to the country of his birth become for Litvinoff conflicting loyalties to his mother's house and to his wife and the future of his children. 'Jerusalem,' all unconsciously, has become a symbol of his childhood country. And the condition becomes more complex because the poet is concerned also with Israel and Jerusalem as an entity as we understand it.

Evidence of a Christian attitude rather than a Jewish one is seen in the first poem of the book where the guilt of Cain is accepted as endemic. There is a hint of original sin:

> *Caesar is dead and sleeps in stone*
> *his marble shadow broken at its knees:*
> *the spent arena fills with enemies.*
> *No trumpet but the trumpet's echo*
> *calls these to war: the father's*
> *wound forgotten in the head*
> *is still remembered in the heart*
> *and genitals, and so their curses*
> *meet and clash like brass. The flower*
> *deceived them all—not blood betrayed*
> *them to their violent fate, but*
> *the cold hands of stone, the cold hands*
> *and the stone's laughter.*

Yet there is a contradiction. Emanuel Litvinoff writing a poem *Reflections on a Lost Time of Youth* suggests that the child is 'innocent'. And of course as a child the poet had not thought of forsaking his 'Jerusalem'. Again, whilst a soldier in Africa, he observed the Negroes and judged them also as innocent, for these, he writes, 'are simple and loved by the sun'. Perhaps Litvinoff conceived them as guiltless because they had never, as it were, left their 'black Israel!'

Later the temptation of Christianity is aggressively denied. More than ever, as in his important poem *To T. S. Eliot* (where he attacks that poet for his—albeit passive—anti-semitism) he once again identifies himself with the fugitive Jew.

The second part of *A Crown for Cain* is named *The Thorn of Exile* and if some would tend to understand this title in terms of the severed umbilical cord, others would take it at its face value and see the exile simply as the author intended it: simply as the Jew banished from Palestine. At the time of this book it must be remembered that Israel as a Jewish independent home was nearly

but not quite that consummated dream.

The texture of the language in this poem is quite different from most of the poetry in *A Crown for Cain*. It is neither ponderous nor pessimistic. It is in no way grim; and curiously it approaches in its atmospheric quality the work of the important modern Israeli poet, Nathan Alterman.

One cannot but speculate what sort of poetry Emanuel Litvinoff would write should he go to Israel and feel himself an integral part of its purpose and its destiny. On the contrary Litvinoff makes it plain that he belongs to a dying race. Now that Israel is a fact the Jew has the alternative either of emigrating to the Hebrew State or in effect of gradually losing his separate Jewish identity. It is only a matter of generations before the Jew in exile will cease to exist as a Jew. A new history has begun in which, however, Litvinoff cannot participate, for he feels that his roots lie in the history of the ghetto, in a shifting, alien, hostile climate.

The language of *A Crown for Cain* is a distinct improvement on that of *The Untried Soldier*. It still suffers though, from an excessive display of ornamental adjectives, and too often the presence of a cliché (a cliché of word rather than phrase) ruins the effectiveness of what otherwise would be a fresh experience. Perhaps these defects, above all, have prevented Litvinoff from gaining the recognition he would otherwise richly deserve.

The poetic imagination of Emanuel Litvinoff can never be questioned and his craft is rapidly improving. He will, I am sure, present an important contribution to English literature as a poet who recognizes his roots eagerly and with tenderness, and who, unlike Isaac Rosenberg, is not only a Jew but Jewish. His poetry is the poetry of protest, protest against a civilization which sent him to war, as well as one that has committed pogroms on his race for thousands of years. Rarely is he lyrically gentle, sometimes he is satirical, but for the most part he is bitter and angry, for wherever he looks he is haunted by the human tragedy of which the Jewish story is but a typical part.

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